



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

2003 SESSION UPDATE

Less than two months remain in the regular 105-day legislative session, and we have gotten off to a quick start.

BUDGET

Senate and House approve GOP-proposed supplemental budget saving taxpayers millions.

Putting the governor's proposed savings for the next two-year budget on a fast track, the Senate promptly approved a supplemental budget (SB 5403) for the rest of the current fiscal year that starts the savings now. A key reason for making cuts now is that it will produce an even greater savings in the next biennium—about \$250 million. Cost-saving budget initiatives include stepping up efforts to ensure those receiving state-subsidized health care insurance are indeed eligible, extending the state hiring freeze to all state agencies except for prisons and higher education, and a 20 percent reduction in state spending on travel, personal services contracts and equipment. Although the House version of the supplemental budget made a few changes and saves a bit less, quick action by the Senate to concur with the changes will save taxpayers even more.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation Efficiency Act of 2003 and Department of Transportation (DOT) performance audit bill.

I have introduced a 12-point transportation efficiency measure (SB 5702) aimed at ensuring the wise use of gas tax dollars. The 12-point package includes:

- Putting construction project decisions in the hands of the Legislature;
- Requiring the Legislative Transportation Committee to oversee mandatory performance audits of DOT;
- Contracting out for highway maintenance;
- Modifying prevailing wage requirements;
- Repealing expenditure requirements for paths, trails and public art;
- Getting DOT out of the rail business;
- Privatizing highway rest areas;
- Making transportation investments that move the most people and goods for the least amount of money;
- Directing the sales tax on highway construction to highway projects;
- Limiting HOV lanes to highways with at least four general-purpose lanes in each direction;
- Privatizing passenger-only ferries and exploring lease options; and
- Including the gas tax collected from **all** counties in the general transportation fund.

PROTECTING CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT

Recently, a Battle Ground mother, Jennifer Zora, came to me with a problem. The Zoras and 18 other families who border the Hockinson School District requested a boundary change so their kids could enter the Hockinson School District. After their request was denied at the local level, they were told that other than going through the state court system, which would be very costly, there was no authority to appeal school district boundaries. In an effort to afford our citizens due process, I introduced **SB 5437**, which gives citizens an affordable method of appealing changes in school district boundaries. Citizen involvement in government is an important American ideal and should be applied to all levels of government. The Senate approved this measure last week.

FRAUD

As the chairman of the Senate Financial Services, Insurance and Housing Committee, I have joined with Senate and House lawmakers from both political parties to beef up the state's ability to protect consumers and



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Financial Services, Insurance and Housing, Chairman
- Highways & Transportation Vice Chairman
- Rules
- Economic Development

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prosecute criminals. This is in response to ever-increasing accounts of identity theft and the fraudulent use of driver’s licenses, credit cards and credit card scanning machines. The Financial Fraud Package includes:

- **SB 5715/HB 1842** allows for the establishment of an information sharing system;
- **SB 5716/HB 1843** prohibits the manufacture and/or sale of fraudulent driver’s licenses;
- **SB 5717/HB 1844** criminalizes the possession and/or production of instruments or equipment used in committing financial fraud;
- **SB 5718/HB 1845** exempts bank, social security, and credit card numbers from public disclosure;
- **SB 5719/HB 1846** criminalizes the fraudulent use of credit card scanners; and
- **SB 5720/HB 1847** allows merchants to request additional identification for credit/debit card transactions

TAX JUSTICE

Senate asks Congress to restore the sales tax deduction on federal income tax forms. In 1986, federal tax changes removed the itemized deduction for state and local sales taxes on federal income tax forms. It is estimated that Washington residents pay an additional \$500 million annually in federal tax because of this. Citizens who live in states with an income tax can still deduct that tax on their federal tax forms. **SJM 8003** asks Congress to restore the sales tax deduction. A bill currently before the U.S. House of Representatives would allow taxpayers of states with no income tax to deduct state and local sales taxes. (H.R. 261 -

Stop Discrimination Against Seven States Act of 2003).

Visit <http://www.house.gov/> to find out how to contact your U.S. representative in support of H.R. 261.

While we are on the subject of taxation, I would like to share with you my efforts to **improve tax equity between Washington and Oregon**. As you may be aware, more than 60,000 Washington residents work in Oregon and pay Oregon’s income tax, amounting to more than \$120 million annually. Oregon residents are exempt from paying sales tax in Washington. For years, I have led the fight against this unfair taxation on Washington residents. And for years, I have been ignored by Oregon’s Legislature and governor. This year, I proposed **SB 5841**, which would authorize Washington counties to levy special taxes against Oregonians who work in Washington. My goal with this legislation is to let Oregon’s officials know we mean business and want the issue of tax inequity resolved, not ignored.

CITIZEN INITIATIVES

Recent attempts by certain legislators to eliminate or stifle citizen participation in the political process by attacking the initiative process are totally unacceptable to me. The right of the public to create public policy was guaranteed in the Washington State Constitution. This battle heated up in Olympia last week. In fact, I opposed my own caucus on the floor of the Senate in a procedural vote for the first time in nine years because I felt so strongly about this issue. I will continue to fight any effort to stifle or eliminate citizen participation in our government.

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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